

Annual Reports as Autobiography: A Tale of a Television Company

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ABSTRACT

Once merely straightforward accounts of a company's activities and fiscal performance in the preceding year, annual reports (ARs), a form of purposive communication, have grown polysemic as they become enriched with graphics, visuals, and texts. Accordingly, they serve as important framing devices through which a company can present its own story, its autobiography. Using the ARs of ABS-CBN, arguably the biggest media conglomerate in the Philippines, between 1996 and 2010 as a case study, this paper seeks, at the theoretical and methodological levels, to apply Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework in the study of ARs and, at the practical level, to highlight ABS-CBN's corporate storytelling. Findings indicate the utility of CDA in understanding the annual report, both as imbued with meaning on its own and in relation to its stakeholders. Moreover, this study explicates ABS-CBN's narrative about its standing as a national yet increasingly global network that has faced significant challenges in the course of fifteen years.

Keywords: Philippines, annual reports, television, Critical Discourse Analysis

The annual report (AR), an example of purposive communication, is a corporation's summary of the previous year (Subramanian, Insley, and Blackwell). Originally, the AR comprised a letter from the chair (Marino Jr.) and a straightforward presentation of requisite financial information for the use of shareholders and stockbrokers (Alattar and Al-Khater; Penrose). However, others argue that the AR's narrative section is more important than the financial reports it precedes, because it provides context to the presented data (Penrose). The chair's letter used to be the main, if not the only, part of the AR's narrative section. However, the narrative has since been enriched with thematic content presented using graphical (Beattie, Dhanani, and Jones; Courtis; Penrose); visual (Anderson and Imperia; Beattie, Dhanani and Jones; Bujaki and McConomy; Ditlevsen; Pasadeos and Yeap); and textual (Hyland; Rutherford; Tewari; Yuthas, Rogers and Dillard) elements. Together, these elements help portray the corporation to its increasingly diverse audiences (Campbell, McPhail,

and Slack). While the AR is still primarily designed for current and prospective investors (David), it now also has to communicate the company and its previous year to employees (Anderson and Imperia), customers, and other stakeholders (Hutt; Tewari). From being a purely financial report, the AR has become a key strategic communication tool for promoting investor and public relations (Ditlevsen). Whereas the AR has historically been a primarily one-dimensional document focusing on financial accounting, it has evolved to become a holistic autobiographical account of an organization.

The AR's changing nature has been the subject of research for nearly two decades. Studies show the physical content of ARs has changed to make space for additional text (Pasadeos and Yeap) as well as graphics and photography (David). More recent studies reinforce the continuing changes to the AR, particularly the evolution of its narrative content and aesthetic elements (Campbell, McPhail, and Slack). Beattie, Dhanani, and Jones (181-82) say that the transformation of the AR "from a rather dull financial document to a colorful marketing and public relations document in which the financial statements are relegated to a technical 'appendix'" is "a result of the changing corporate reporting environment." Today's ARs thus convey "the personality and philosophy of the firm to the readers" (Anderson and Imperia 113).

ARs provide a way to understand corporate personality, an abstract concept that has received much attention in recent literature. Corporate personality, according to research, manifests through the actions of an organization as a unit (Melewar), the behavior of its employees (Ashman and Winstanley), or the adjectives used to describe the organization and its employees (Kim, Baek, and Martin; Sung and Yang). Chun and Davies (139) define corporate personality in terms of how "a stakeholder distinguishes an organization, expressed in terms of human characteristics." Corporate personality is important because stakeholders use it as a benchmark for their relationships with an organization. For instance, Chun and Davies argue that agreeableness—which encompasses warmth, empathy, and integrity—is one of the five factors of corporate personality very important to employee satisfaction. Moreover, they argue, agreeableness as a whole promotes levels of satisfaction among employees and customers. Researchers say ARs provide a gateway to corporate personality. Corporations use their ARs to articulate positive images of themselves (Breton), to appeal to their readers (Courtis), or to depict their corporate identity (Ditlevsen). Based on this literature, therefore, ARs are arguably a self-written account, an autobiography, of a corporation.

Researchers have indeed been able to surface corporate personality by treating ARs or components of them as narratives. They do this by treating the entire AR as a

genre (Beattie, Dhanani, and Jones; White and Hanson) or by distinguishing the narrative content, such as the chair's letter and other essays from the numeric financial data (Breton; Rutherford). The distinction between the narrative content and the financial review section is important, especially for the diverse audiences of ARs (David).

Beattie, Dhanani, and Jones consider accounting narratives as the sum of storytelling narratives (the chair's statement, the chief executive's review, and the operating and financial review) and descriptive narratives (the directors' report, statement of directors' responsibilities, remuneration report, and corporate governance report). Approached this way, accounting narratives arguably create a genre because "they are discourses directed to the past, future and present of corporate activity; they are addressed to recurrent problems; and they are elements in the system of corporate functions" (White and Hanson 305).

FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The case study for this research is ABS-CBN, the biggest media network in the Philippines (Brillon; Cabalquinto; Raymundo). It traces its roots to the Alto Broadcasting System, which in 1953 made the first full broadcast in the country, and the Chronicle Broadcasting Network of the Lopez family, which remains its majority owner. The Marcos government sequestered ABS-CBN in 1972 following the declaration of Martial Law, and a crony of President Ferdinand Marcos took over the network. In 1986, President Corazon Aquino returned ABS-CBN to the Lopezes, who, within a year, made the network the most popular in the country. Today, ABS-CBN reaches 97 percent of Philippine households. In 2010, it had a share of 43 percent among daytime national audiences and 46 percent among evening primetime national audiences. Moreover, it broadcast sixteen of the top twenty weekday programs and twenty of the top twenty-three weekend programs in the country.

ABS-CBN, whose corporate motto is "In the service of the Filipino," became a corporation in 1992, when it was first listed in the Philippine Stock Exchange. In 1999, ABS-CBN Holdings Corporation was also listed in the Philippine Stock Exchange. This conglomerate oversees ABS-CBN's stake in UHF and VHF free TV, interactive media, cable television, AM and FM radio, cinema, recording, magazine publication, licensing, and public service.

ABS-CBN's ARs from 1996 to 2010, retrieved from the corporation's investor relations website (<http://ir.abs-cbn.com/>), supply the dataset for this study. The

fifteen-year period covers ABS-CBN's significant expansion from a national to a global media organization (Brillon) following the introduction in 1994 of ABS-CBN International, which exports ABS-CBN programs and operates its affiliate stations abroad. The timeframe thus facilitates the investigation of how ABS-CBN articulated its own transition period across time and space, two concepts which, as this study indicates, manifest in the macro analysis of its ARs.

The longitudinal approach to the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of ARs (Beattie, Dhanani, and Jones; Campbell, McPhail, and Slack) provides a temporal perspective on changes in corporate personality (Ditlevsen) and examines micro-, meso-, and macro-level meanings of the AR for each year and across years. The corpus (Hyland), together with the literature, also allows for an intertextual reading of the ARs. As in other research that uses CDA, this paper does not infer stakeholder reactions to what the ARs present and surface. Fairclough clarifies that CDA focuses on interpreting text, rather than producing its use. Thus, CDA in this paper surfaces ABS-CBN's account of its story by examining the words and images in its ARs rather than the interviews with its corporate representatives or its stakeholders. When studying a media organization's corporate personality, it is important to consider the corporation's self-framing, to see whether this is congruent with how audiences perceive its character. Studies have shown that television news media, for example, can be characterized as competent, timely, and dynamic (Chan-Olmsted and Cha) and that news media brands can be trustworthy, dynamic, sincere, sophisticated, or tough (Kim, Baek, and Martin).

Many studies approach ARs qualitatively (Hyland; Penrose), as this paper does. Such qualitative approaches particularly apply to ARs which are complex genres, imbued with different meanings (Breton), designed for specific audiences (Hutt) or produced for various stakeholders who may have incompatible demands (White and Hanson). Research has used this approach to study the polysemy of ARs in order to "show the dissonance between the subject and the representation of this subject that the sign portrays" (David 199) or to explore how text obfuscates (Hrasky, Mason, and Wills) or discloses (Beattie, Dhanani, and Jones) information about a company. Research has also applied semiotics, or the study of meaning, to imagery in ARs (Ditlevsen; Penrose). Through this approach, studies have shown how ARs use "idealized images that evoke the beauty and efficiency of business locations and operations, eliminating reference to the less positive realities of the business world, such as the dangers and pressures to workers and injuries to the environment that business and industry create" (David 198). Using CDA to analyze ARs thus contributes to the increasingly diverse ways in which ARs have been studied (Hrasky, Mason, and Wills).

Conceptualizing ARs as communication instruments (Breton), particularly as narratives or as genre, facilitates their study as discourses (Hyland). Discourses are bodies of communication; understanding the relationships among their internal elements and how they interact with other discourses clarifies their meaning. In his Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, Fairclough identifies three layers through which we can examine discourse: as text, as discursive practice, and as social practice. Informed by Ditlevsen's work on the qualitative, multi-pronged approach to the elements of AR, this paper examines elements of ABS-CBN's ARs using CDA. Based on this approach, this paper explores three objectives:

1. At the micro level, to examine the ARs' structure and content to explicate the use of specific AR sections for particular messages;
2. At the meso level, to surface the themes which comprise the autobiographical discourse of ABS-CBN as contextualized in the narrative structure identified in the preceding level; and
3. At the macrolevel, to situate the corporation and its AR in the national discourse through a cross-thematic reading of the themes surfaced at the meso level.

The three-pronged approach addresses paucities in studies which treat ARs as having objective content that can be subjected to readability approaches to determine its readability. Indeed, readability studies of written content indicate that ARs contain too much detail and jargon (Frownfelter-Lohrke and Fulkerson), and that they have become easier to read but their language is more vivid (Pasadeos and Yeap). However, although readability approaches offer an objective method of content analysis, they cannot measure the way text is organized within a document (Breton; Subramanian, Insley, and Blackwell). Thus, approaching ARs as discursive materials (Tewari) addresses this research gap and facilitates their literal, interpretive, and reflexing reading in line with the qualitative approach to textual analysis (Mason).

There is a practice among researchers who use CDA to inform it with other theories to guide the progression of ideas across the framework's three levels. However, this study uses a grounded approach in which the concepts in the micro (text) level, the themes in the meso (discursive) level, and the implications in the macro (social practice) level emerge and are extrapolated through iterative readings of the ARs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Micro Level: The Building Blocks

The Structure of ABS-CBN's ARs

ABS-CBN's ARs underwent significant changes in fifteen years. From its straightforward twenty-four-page format in 1996 with the Financial Report and the Report of the Chair and the President, the AR became a full-color and thematically designed ninety-nine-page document by 2010. ABS-CBN's expansion from a primarily broadcast company to a multimedia conglomerate necessitated a lengthier section on finances. However, the later ARs also devoted additional space to new sections about the company and operational highlights (OH) of the previous year. This trend started with a short feature entitled "Your Company" in 1997 and became fully realized in 1998, through an OH that draws parallels between the previous year and forty-five years of Philippine television.

In the span of fifteen years, ABS-CBN changed its approach to ARs. The financial section was expanded and moved from the second half of the report to the middle, sandwiched between the Report to the Shareholders and the images of the board and its employees. The Report to the Shareholders also changed. Until 2008, the chair and the president signed it together. But in 2009 and 2010, they provided separate letters.

The section on performance highlights (PH) does not consistently appear across the ARs. It was absent in 1996 and from 2005 to 2008. In 2004, having lost its sixteen-year market leadership in the Metro Manila to its rival GMA Network the previous year, ABS-CBN downsized the charts and tables featured in the AR from six to three. Charts on overall channel share and top-rating programs in Metro Manila and two other metropolitan centers replaced the charts for overall comparative channel audience share in Metro Manila and nine key cities. This report excluded overall comparative channel advertisement minutes and the listings of top-rating programs, entertainment programs, and news and current affairs programs, although it had featured them since 1998. When the PH section was reinstated in 2009, the variables it presented were no longer consistent with those in 2004 and subsequently in 2010.

The Content of ABS-CBN's ARs

But what exactly was explicated in the changing and expanding structure of the ARs?

The cover and the OH serve as the key devices with which the ARs highlight the theme of a particular year. Annual themes are a new feature of ARs, conveyed through elements such as the cover, a slogan, a feature essay or series of essays, or a visual motif (David). Pasadeos and Yeap quantify thematic content by the amount of space devoted to the Chief Executive Officer's message, personnel, operations, social responsibility, finances, and other content.

Indeed, from 1996 to 1999, only the words imply the theme, particularly in the Report of the Chair and the President (RCP). However, starting in 1999—with the feature on Lopez Jr., the chairman who helped to found ABS-CBN in the 1960s and rebuild it from 1987 onward—the themes grew more pronounced. The ARs defined these themes through extended essays and design elements such as icons, colors, and typefaces.

The ARs recurrently invoke the history of ABS-CBN, on its own or in relation to the Philippines. The feature on Lopez Jr., for instance, draws parallels between his life, the rise of ABS-CBN, and national history. The RCP states, "We stood at the end of the year with mixed feelings about the year that had passed.... It was the year we paid our final respects to our Kapitan Geny Lopez, whose determination rebuilt ABS-CBN to heights that surpass its former glory. From the ashes of Martial Law to the crumbling walls of a run-down studio, the most powerful transmitter in the world has arisen" (4). ABS-CBN resurrects Lopez Jr.'s legacy in the 2004 AR, where the network reflects on his words as advice about how it can and will regain market leadership in the Metro Manila ratings game.

The ARs also highlight how the story of ABS-CBN is in itself the story of Philippine television. This theme begins in the enumerative timeline of the 1996 AR, the RCP of which states, "1996 was a milestone in ABS-CBN's colorful history as the network celebrated its 50th year of committed communications and half-century of dedicated public service" (2). The 1998 AR features a more comprehensive, historically themed essay that includes then-and-now accounts of celebrities and employees who worked with ABS-CBN through the years. The network also used the historical frame in 2002 when celebrating its 50th anniversary, the AR for which is rendered in gold.

Although the content of most OH focuses on divisions (1998, 2003, 2007, 2008, and 2010) and select shows and initiatives (2001 and 2006), the ARs present this content through different themes. As I stated earlier, ABS-CBN presents the 1998 divisions through the purview of people with whom it holds long-term relationships. The use of people to talk about the divisions is a framing device that the ARs apply in various ways. The 2000 AR employs it by using the stories of employees as they proceed through their days “going through the extra mile” (6) as the feature was titled. The 2003 AR uses this style for the theme “We are ABS-CBN. We are the people working for you” (10). In this AR, employees from different divisions write about their experiences. A brief pitch about the employees’ divisions accompanies these personal essays. The device also unites individual Filipinos in a collective to highlight the relationship between ABS-CBN divisions and their audiences. The 2009 AR features stories about members of the public in relation to ABS-CBN’s initiatives. One section shows how ABS-CBN Radio and Major Mario Topacio, a commanding officer of the Philippine army, are both “reliable even in times of crisis” (18), as the essay was subtitled.

The themes of the latter four ARs talk about the connection between ABS-CBN and its audience. They most often render this connection as a journey which ABS-CBN shares with Filipinos in and outside the Philippines. Under the banner “A whole new world for Filipinos” (10), the 2005 AR shows a jeepney—the country’s primary mode of public transport, which has become a national icon—traveling around a globe, the equator of which is marked by the concentric circles of ABS-CBN’s logo. Journey as a framing device is strongest in the 2007 AR, which uses images of flight to explicate the theme “One world. One network. One journey.” The journey motif was again present in the 2010 AR: “Taking to heart our commitment to journey with Filipinos wherever they may be, we find ways to innovate and stay connected with our customers by creating relevant products and services that are made available to them at the time, place, and medium of their choice” (ii). Identification with audiences is also the theme of the 2006 AR, which proclaims “A Kapamilya Nation” where various ABS-CBN programs, products, and services are integral to the Filipino way of life. “Kapamilya” (Filipino for “a member of the family”) is a key branding strategy launched in 2003 in time for ABS-CBN’s 50th anniversary.

Meso Level: ABS-CBN’s Discourse in Its ARs

The micro level shows how the current structure and content of ARs provide specific spaces for narratives which essay annual themes. The question which then arises is,

across fifteen years, what themes about ABS-CBN emerged given the form and substance of its ARs? It is important to surface these themes because these connect organizations to, and allow them to negotiate meaning with, their stakeholders (David). The discourse analysis reveals five such themes:

An Organization with a Sense of History

In the ARs, ABS-CBN constantly invokes its pioneering role in Philippine broadcasting. In the 2002 AR, the RCP states, “This year marks the 50th anniversary of television in the Philippines, and today, as it did fifty years ago, ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corporation (ABS-CBN) stands at the forefront of an industry distinguished for continuous innovation and creativity” (4). The ARs of other years also highlight the link between past, present, and future, such as the 1998 AR, in which the OHs note, “Forty-five years after introducing television to the Philippines, ABS-CBN remains poised to break new ground in the field of broadcasting and to face the challenge of the new millennium” (6). The 2007 RCP evokes this again when it says, “As your company approaches its 55th year in 2008, the fiery passion that gave birth to ABS-CBN continues to drive us” (4).

ABS-CBN also links itself with Philippine history in general. In the 1997 AR, the feature “This is ABS-CBN” highlights how, “On the occasion of the company’s 50th Anniversary of Committed Communications and Service to the Filipino, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines awarded ABS-CBN with the first Special Commemorative Postage Stamp Issue honoring a Filipino media network, thereby institutionalizing the significant role ABS-CBN plays in nation-building” (1). The 2007 RCP cites this link more concretely, noting, “With our history strongly linked with that of the country, we are dedicated to nation-building” (5).

The earlier ARs quite frequently cite ABS-CBN’s role in introducing technology to the Philippines. The 1996 RCP says, “Unlike our competitors who have gone for quantity, we have concentrated on quality by establishing state-of-the-art broadcast complexes with an average of 25Kw, enabling us to transmit the best signals and excellent locally produced programs to our provincial audiences” (6). However, the pursuit of creativity and service always tempers the focus on ABS-CBN’s technological savvy. The 1997 feature on the company says, “ABS-CBN pioneered innovations in broadcast technologies ... developed creative broadcast designs ... and championed the broadcast media as an effective tool for social change” (4). Over a decade later, the 2008 Chairman’s Report reiterates this: “We remain

passionately committed to create and acquire the best content and deliver it to the public we serve, through the widest network of platforms that technology allows” (4).

The Leader through Its Crises

In 1997, ABS-CBN also used history to frame its market leadership. The feature about the company in that year’s AR says, “In less than six months after its re-launch in March 1987, ABS-CBN rewrote broadcast history by rising from the cellar and claiming its enviable niche as industry leader and pacesetter—a feat unchallenged to this very day” (5). Positioning itself as the market leader was part of ABS-CBN’s corporate rhetoric; that it maintained this position during crises in local and international markets and politics was especially important. “In 1996,” according to the RCP, “ABS-CBN remained the dominant leader in the industry with a 41% audience share in Metro Manila compared to our closest competitor’s 22%. In the provinces, we attracted as much as 70% audience share while our closest rival had 8.2% for both prime and non-primetime slots” (2). Industry benchmarks are used again in the 1998 AR and gets amplified in 1999, the AR for which states the previous year “was a year your company ruled all media, dominating its traditional hallmark of TV and radio broadcasting, while scaling new heights in related fields of entertainment such as music recording and movie production” (5).

However, the 2004 AR, which essays ABS-CBN’s loss of its market leadership, shows a sense of hubris for the network. That year’s RCP says, “the sting of breaking a sixteen-year winning streak had to hurt.... Until we took stock and reflected. And if looking back on half a century’s worth of your Company’s history has shown us anything, it is our ability to endure adversity” (4). The following year, this ponderous tone continues. The 2005 RCP states, “Another year has passed. And slowly but surely, with the introduction of new shows from a revitalized programming group, we are rebuilding our strength in primetime and beginning to close the gap that our leading competitor established in Metro Manila” (5). In 2006, when ABS-CBN regained its market leadership, the announcement in the AR is similarly reflective and subdued:

After we lost the ratings leadership in Mega Manila 3 years ago, we vowed to regain it with vigor. The road to recovery has not been easy... We started by examining ourselves. In the painful process, we rediscovered ABS-CBN’s leadership. We rediscovered who we are—an institution with a great history and deep commitment to values and service. (4)

Subsequent ARs, however, hold the same confidence that ABS-CBN had before 2004. The 2007 RCP says, “The year 2007 counts among ABS-CBN’s banner years. Buoyed by the confirmation of national leadership, political spending, and expanding global business, the company shows outstanding financial performance” (4). Three years later, “2010 was a great year for ABS-CBN. We benefitted from the overall growth of the Philippine economy ... ABS-CBN remained the benchmark of Philippine TV programming, suiting the tastes and reflecting the values of our people” (6). An organization that survives internal and external crises is a recurrent self-framing device for ABS-CBN. The 2007 RCP describes this succinctly: “The company’s long and colorful history has been marked by triumphant victories and painful challenges” (4).

Indeed, most ARs note some type of crisis and explain how ABS-CBN navigated through it. In 1997, when Asian markets tumbled, the RCP said, “The economic crisis and the currency turmoil had considerable effect on the movie industry ... Despite this trend, your Network’s integrated approach to the film business has continued to produce entertainment products that enhance the ABS-CBN library of ancillary rights” (14). The following year’s RCP reiterates this: “As you will see in the next few pages, your company performed extremely well despite the gloomy outlook and economic uncertainties that prevailed in the year just passed” (4).

The ARs also note crises in Philippine politics and use them as contexts for the strength of ABS-CBN. In 2000 and 2001, for instance, the Philippines were in turmoil because of the impeachment process against former President Joseph Estrada. The 2000 AR, however, lauds ABS-CBN’s performance in this otherwise difficult time as it states, “And as we have proven time and again, going the extra mile is not without its rewards. In a year that saw a lot of Philippine companies show their vulnerability to the uncertainties of the economic and political arena, ABS-CBN continued to buck the trend and show double-digit revenue and net income growth” (5). Subsequently, during the economic slowdown of recent years, ABS-CBN reused this approach to describe itself. The 2009 AR is an example:

At the beginning of the year, the outlook for 2009 was dim amidst a weak business environment locally and globally. But even under such an environment, your company once again proved that excellent products and services founded on a passionate drive to serve deliver sound business results even during trying times. (6)

A Servant Corporation

The ARs constantly frame ABS-CBN within its corporate mission of “In the service of the Filipino.” Pronouncements that ABS-CBN is a market leader always link, in seeming contrast, to its professed role as a “servant” of its audience. The 1997 company profile says, “After the revolution of the people in 1986, during another time of beginnings, ABS-CBN was reborn with a renewed spirit and a renewed commitment to the Filipino people” (4). Meanwhile, according to the following year’s AR, ABS-CBN undertook its activities “in order to deliver the finest in Filipino news and entertainment, create the best working environment for our employees, and generate the highest returns to our shareholders, all in the service of the Filipino” (5).

The words of Lopez Jr. on the concept of service are the centerpiece of the 1999 AR. Among his quotations is, “Public service is the only reason for our existence. Profit alone is not enough of a reason to go into business. But if we can serve people, then I think our growth and our success will follow. If we take care of our customers, then they will take care of us” (8). The 2004 AR recalls this. Following the network’s loss of market leadership, it says, “Geny Lopez said ABS-CBN’s only reason for being is to serve the Filipino. And by word and deed he taught us what true service means” (10). The ARs do not only use Philippine crises as contexts for ABS-CBN’s performance and character as a market leader; they also use them to explain ABS-CBN’s sense of service. For example, ARs essay how the network was involved in the impeachment proceedings against the president in 2000 and in rescue operations for typhoon victims in 2005.

A Worker for the People

Beyond its corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices, ABS-CBN frames its work and the labor of its employees as service to the public. The 2001 OH say, “The ABS-CBN culture recognizes and praises entrepreneurial drive, solid work ethic, and most of all, the courage to do what needs to be done. To work for ABS-CBN is to commit to doing whatever it takes to serve fellow Filipinos.”

In separate letters to the shareholders, the chair and the president capture this spirit in the 2008 AR. The chair writes, “We will journey with them to the future as we continue to capture the imagin[ation] and enrich the mind, touch the heart and lighten the spirit—bringing closer to each other beyond the borders of time and space” (5). The president, meanwhile, writes, “We will remain strong because we are

firmly dedicated to a mission of service to the Filipino people. We perpetually touch their lives; they continuously give us their trust. We mutually bring out the best in us” (7). The 2009 and 2010 ARs also use this approach.

In 2006, however, whether ABS-CBN indeed worked to serve its audience was put into question when seventy-eight people were killed and around 400 people injured at a stampede during the anniversary of its flagship noontime show, *Wowowee*. The Chairman’s Report uses its employees as a frame to address the issue:

By the start of 2006, the whole organization was poised to fly. Then the ULTRA tragedy happened.... There were not a few who believed that the institution would sink in the depths of such an unimaginably tragic event. However, in this worst of times, the rediscovered roots stood the test. The organization went through fire and gold shone through. Our employees came in droves to serve and withstood the darkest days. (4)

The President’s Message of 2010 also makes this connection: “But more than knowledge and skills, the strength of our human resource comes from their genuine desire to help make life better for all Filipinos. Our ability to connect with the Filipino is achieved only through authentic empathy.”

In its ARs, ABS-CBN frames itself as a company that is proud of its employees. The 2002 RCP notes the work of the people when it states, “No top-rated show, no certified box-office hit, no multi-platinum record, is made without a group of creative individuals working together, often as one team (though sometimes agreeably not), but always passionately committed to creating the best content they can produce” (9). In 2009, this sentiment is again present in the President’s Message: “We remained true to our talent and employees. We continued to invest in creative talent and employees through continuous training and development, a process we started years ago but continue to refine and expand” (9).

A Global Company

With the launch of its international arm, ABS-CBN started to frame itself as a global company reaching out to Filipinos overseas in its ARs (2000, 2002, 2004). The 2000 RCP, for example, says, “It is in our presence abroad—where we were not content at being the only source of Filipino entertainment to over seven million overseas foreign workers and instead evolved into a one-stop shop for all their needs” (4). Starting in 2005, ABS-CBN drew parallels between its move toward

overseas markets and the experiences of migrant workers from the Philippines. The 2005 RCP says, “Following our countrymen, as their desire to provide a better life for their families bring[s] them overseas, made us realize how small our planet really is” (5). The 2006 Chairman’s Report also notes this: “We continued the expansion of our business outside the Philippines.... All these we do to improve our ability to serve the Filipino abroad, our modern-day economic heroes” (5).

Macro Level: ABS-CBN’s ARs and the National Discourse

The meso level analysis reveals five themes that ABS-CBN uses in its autobiographical accounts in and through its ARs. According to its ARs, ABS-CBN is (1) an organization with a sense of history, (2) a leader through its crises, (3) a global company, (4) a worker for the people, and (5) a servant corporation. The next question is: how do the intersections across these five themes comprise the ABS-CBN story as it relates to the society which hosts it? Extrapolations between these corporate and national discourses, which reflexively informs and is informed by each other, surface three themes: the continuum of time, the expansion of space, and the constancy of service.

The Continuum of Time

The ARs constantly navigate temporal dimensions, linking the year just past to historical events and plans for the future. The themes “an organization with a sense of history” and “a leader through its crises,” which dominate the ARs, locate ABS-CBN within a historical continuum in which the company grows and expands by itself and in relation to Philippine events.

Indeed, ARs regularly dwell on the network’s role as a pioneer in Philippine broadcasting and its continuing leadership in the industry. With this framing, the ARs go beyond chronicling only the network. They also serve as a reference in Philippine broadcasting history as they revisit how ABS-CBN was founded as the country’s first television company, sequestered during Martial Law, and succeeded with the return of democracy, private enterprise, and the free press. At the same time, although not with the same intensity and regularity, they serve as a timeline for external events, such as the 1997 Asian economic crises, the 2001 Joseph Estrada impeachment trial, and the perennial man-made and natural disasters in the Philippines. The ARs cite successes in Philippine economy as bases for good years, and use economic slowdown and political turmoil to highlight resiliency through crises.

More recent ARs depict this relationship between the corporate and national stories as a journey that ABS-CBN and Filipinos—both in and outside the country—take together as a family. However, ABS-CBN's loss of market leadership in 2004 meant a temporary break in discourse linking its corporate story to the national discourse of a growing Philippine economy. Thus, instead of using the nation as context, the company looked at its own history, particularly through the legacy of its founder, Lopez Jr. This internal crisis marked a change in the voice of ABS-CBN; it moved from the bravado of its sixteen-year market leadership to the more measured pronouncements of its subsequent recapture of the Metro Manila audience. The crisis also resulted in a reconfiguration of the network's ARs. The variables presented in the PH, which had remained constant since 1997, changed in 2004 before disappearing for four years. Even when they returned, the variables were in flux. Thus, this aspect of temporal continuity in the ARs had ceased.

The Expansion and Enrichment of Space

Even as ARs invoke multiple temporal dimensions, they also present the ABS-CBN story in terms of the expansion and enrichment of space, clearly articulated in the ARs' increasing focus on the global Filipino. The early ARs focus on Filipinos within the Philippine state, noting the pioneering technologies that ABS-CBN introduced in the country to connect Filipinos across the archipelago. This approach paralleled the government's efforts to foster nation-building after the return of democracy in 1986. However, once ABS-CBN reached almost all Philippine households in the country, its attention shifted to the global Filipino community, composed of migrant workers, overseas residents, and former Philippine citizens (Brillon; Cabalquinto). In the process, ABS-CBN became a global corporation, one of the themes surfaced at the meso level.

By expanding its corporate mission to "In the service of the Filipino ... worldwide," ABS-CBN, like the national government, recognized the economic contributions of the expatriate Philippine community. This attention on the global could have distracted from the focus on the local. Instead, the ARs, in line with government rhetoric, frame overseas Filipinos as part of the state by essentializing their identity through traditional Philippine values and iconography. Thus, even as it highlights its international reach and strengthening presence as a participant in cross-border media flows, ABS-CBN reiterates its nationality. This framing allows identification between the overseas Filipino and the corporation by reinforcing their nationality even as they move across borders.

Another rendition of enriched and expanded spaces pertains to the mediated networks that connect Filipinos locally and globally. This spatial construct first emerged from the national fascination over mobile telephony and other interactive media (Paragas; Pertierra), an area in which ABS-CBN, as a traditional broadcasting company, had no particular stake. However, as the ARs show, ABS-CBN positioned itself as a total information and communications organization by including new media in its regular menu of television, radio, print, and film. In the process, ABS-CBN established itself as a pioneer of emergent mediated spaces, not unlike when it started broadcasting in the Philippines five decades earlier. However, ABS-CBN's acknowledgment of foundational advances in national policy and global technology remains absent, even though these allowed it to introduce new services in the first place.

The Constancy of Service

The various ARs cite and construct time and space differently. In comparison, they are consistent, if not one-dimensional, in the articulation of service as a core concept for ABS-CBN. The ARs explicate how ABS-CBN realizes its corporate mission by being a servant corporation whose workers labor for the people, as two themes indicate

With the success of ABS-CBN's entertainment and news and current affairs programs, it would be easy to believe the network's claim that delivering quality programming is a form of national service. However, ABS-CBN has been the subject of much scrutiny from media critics who suggest that the company only provides what its audience wants, instead of what it needs (Rimban). Noted critic Nestor Torre (1999), for instance, writes, "In the 1990s, cutthroat competition for the greatest number of viewers has prompted big networks to go into "tabloid television," with disheartening and disturbing results (170).

Such criticisms gained considerable credence with the tragic 2006 stampede that killed and injured fans of a program criticized for supposedly exploiting its viewers' poverty for commercial profit. Such aspersions against the quality of ABS-CBN's offerings thus raised doubts about how exactly the company defined service.

ABS-CBN, as its ARs increasingly highlight, continues to strengthen its CSR programs on child welfare, environment protection, educational media, relief operations, and community outreach. ABS-CBN has received much commendation for these programs, and no concerns about beneficiary exploitation or resource

mismanagement have been lodged against it. Therefore, from the purview of discourses shared between ABS-CBN and the Philippines, our questions about these expanding programs should regard not the organization but rather the country. These programs raise questions about the country's capability to protect and promote the welfare of its people. Sagip Kapamilya, for instance, emerged from the need to marshal volunteers and aid for victims of natural and man-made calamities. That ABS-CBN is now a key participant in such rescue missions indicates the company's responsiveness to its audience's needs and also indicts the government for failing to actively protect its people against disasters.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The AR is an important purposive communication platform through which a corporation not only articulates its performance of the previous year (Subramanian, Insley, and Blackwell) but also defines its character. The AR used to be a straightforward presentation of data with a brief explanation from the chair (Marino Jr.; Penrose). However, today's ARs, such as ABS-CBN's, grow increasingly complex in structure and content as they strive to cater to diverse audiences (Campbell, McPhail, and Slack). Thus, inasmuch as corporations use the AR as a strategic communication device, it also offers its readers an intimate view into an organization's self-framing (Anderson and Imperia; Breton; Rutherford).

Through its ARs, ABS-CBN presents itself as a pioneer in Philippine broadcasting, one that has kept its industry leadership through crises within the company, and in the national and global polity and economy. In the process, ABS-CBN has distinguished the diversity of its services as unique in the country. Moreover, it frames itself as a servant of the Filipino people, both within and outside the Philippines, through its own work and the labor of its employees. Its ARs thus imbue ABS-CBN with a character of competence, resiliency, and service, attributes that evoke the heart-mind-body traits that Keller and Richey argue exist in successful businesses.

Although the public gains access to a company's character through its ARs, studying them without context presents limitations, since they are designed to present positive images of their corporations (Breton; Courtis). However, by following the principles of CDA (Fairclough) and contextualizing the AR within social practice, we can reach a more nuanced understanding of corporate character. By doing this with ABS-CBN's ARs, we can locate corporate assertions about historicity and space related to the national milieu. In other words, positioning ABS-CBN itself as a pioneer in

broadcasting—both five decades ago and in the new realm of interactive media—requires an understanding of the policies and technologies of a particular time. The network’s global expansion is not purely a product of its own initiative, but also a response to the burgeoning market created by a Philippine diaspora that started over a century ago. Subjecting ARs to CDA helps to explicate service either as corporate rhetoric that is subject to suspicion and criticism or as corporate activity that indicates failings in the national system.

Scope, Limitations, and Future Directions

This case study of ABS-CBN shows the narrative value of ARs. Although CDA does not seek to draw inferences about the production process behind the narrative, this study’s findings can inform better ways to produce ARs. In the case of ABS-CBN, for instance, sections such as those on PH and OH prove to be important in framing corporate activity and character on top of the RCP. Thus, a company that seeks to delineate both its performance and personality can employ these sections in its ARs. It is important to remember consistency when delivering content. For ABS-CBN, the changing content of PH precludes longitudinal comparison of its performance and raises questions of transparency and audience manipulation. Moreover, if ARs are to be more holistic and strategic in depicting corporate character, we must plot themes as episodes in a narrative that transcends one particular year. Put into practice, this approach could allow a company to develop a five-year plotline in which individual ARs have themes that contribute to an overall story. In ABS-CBN’s ARs, themes emerge not because of particular strategic storylines but because of recurrent themes in the network’s self-conscious autobiographical framing.

The CDA applied in this paper begins with the structure and word content of the ARs. These concepts are sufficient to address this study’s objectives. However, subsequent research could explore other, non-word content of ARs, such as those on graphs (Beattie, Dhanani, and Jones; Courtis; Penrose); visuals (Anderson and Imperia; Beattie, Dhanani, and Jones; Bujaki and McConomy; Ditlevsen; Pasadeos and Yeap); and personalities (Campbell, McPhail, and Slack; Jameson).

CDA treats the narrative as imbued with its own meaning, which is in line with exploratory study’s grounded approach. This study thus surfaces those meanings through iterative readings of the text, without the use or guidance of additional theories. However, subsequent research could investigate ARs from the perspective of those who produce and consume it. This then requires the use and application of

relevant theories. For example, on the production side, it would be feasible to use gatekeeping theory to explore the filtering of corporate information in the framing of corporate personality. Another area to investigate would be the congruence between the AR producers' intentions and the AR readers' responses. In this case, message reception theories can complement CDA. Moreover, specific themes that have been surfaced in this study, such as the tension between locality and globality, can be probed more deeply given their complex relationships that warrant specific theorizing as has been done in previous research (Cabalquinto; Raymundo).

Finally, the longitudinal approach of this study helps us to understand the narrative of corporate self-presentation through time. Since CDA argues that discursive practices such as ARs indicate social practice, subsequent research can perform cross-industry analyses of ARs from particular periods of time to determine the extent to which corporate discourses relate to their social contexts.

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